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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000398

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 3/27/13

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [BM](#) [NLD](#)

SUBJECT: A DAY OF CONTRASTS AND BOMBS IN RANGOON

REF: A. RANGOON 387

[1](#)B. RANGOON 388

Classified By: COM CARMEN M. MARTINEZ. REASON: 1.5(D)

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: Armed Forces Day, March 27, saw the military government mount its traditional large military parade and host a state banquet in the posh Armed Forces grand hall and theater. The pro-democracy parties celebrated Anti-Fascist Resistance Day (commemorating the 1945 switch of General Aung San's Burmese army from the Japanese to the Allied camps) with a well-attended gathering in the hall of the decrepit NLD national headquarters building. The eventful day included two bombs (see reftels), which killed two and injured five. The devices may have been planted by a radical student group frustrated with the lack of progress on the return to democracy. End Summary.

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Armed Forces Day  
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[1](#)2. (U) Undeterred by the early morning discovery of a IED in a park in central Rangoon, the Burmese military held its customary military parade of some 8,000 well-drilled troops. Senior General Than Shwe made short remarks to the assembled group that included foreign military attaches.

[1](#)3. (U) In the evening Than Shwe hosted a black tie gala affair for about 400 people, including top military officers, government officials, and representatives of the diplomatic corps and international organizations. The dinner and cultural show was held in the spacious Armed Forces grand hall and theater complex in northern Rangoon.

[1](#)4. (C) Senior General Than Shwe looked happy and fit. One of his favorites, General Shwe Mann, once again stood in for ailing Vice Senior General Maung Aye. During the socializing period prior to dinner the top four senior generals stood apart from the crowd while most invitees were busy exchanging greetings with various contacts and friends. Oddly, almost no one approached the four top generals. After an embarrassingly long spell, the ambassador from Singapore went up and spoke briefly to General Khin Nyunt.

[1](#)5. (C) After dinner the guests were treated to a cultural show performed by the Ministry of Culture troupe. The evening culminated with a musical drama entitled "Brilliant Endeavors of King Bayinnaung," introduced by the MC as

"reflections on this beloved king, who, utilizing all his physical and mental prowess to advance the well-being of his people, with the army's help, constructed many roads and bridges to tie the land together. He also propagated the Buddhist faith with many generous contributions to temples, monasteries, and pagodas."

(NOTE: probably ninety percent of Than Shwe's public appearances consist of inspecting roads and bridges or making donations to Buddhist groups, leaving little doubt about the real-life hero of the evening's musical drama.)

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Anti-Fascist Resistance Day  
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[1](#)6. (U) About 400 supporters of pro-democracy parties crammed together in the run-down headquarters of the NLD, with scores of people outside listening to the presentations on loudspeakers. There was no visible security force presence and the participants were not hindered in any way. Diplomats representing the U.S., Britain, Australia, Japan, France, Italy, and Korea attended, as did reps from UNDP, UNICEF, and UNODC.

[1](#)7. (U) Speaking forcefully in Burmese, Aung San Suu Kyi recalled her father's aims in leading Burma's drive toward independence. She also echoed JFK's "ask not" speech when she said:

There are some people who ask, "when will we achieve democracy?" Instead of asking such a question, ask yourself whether you are doing your duty and contributing towards it. We need to overcome such difficulties as we did during the revolutionary period against fascists. We will surely

succeed!

18. (U) After her short extemporaneous speech, ASSK sat on the floor on a woven mat alongside NLD party representatives from around the country and listened in the stifling heat to the other speakers. Monks, student groups, and at least 6 other political parties were represented at the event. Former Defense Minister U Tin Oo, the NLD's Vice Chairman, gave the lengthy keynote address, calling for national unity and a strong military with a dignified position within a democratic Union. Afterwards ASSK came over and warmly thanked the Charge' for attending.

19. (C) The NLD's geriatric Central Executive Committee, seated in a row of chairs behind the podium, resembled the front porch, one might imagine, of Rangoon's Home for the Aged and Infirm.

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Comment  
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110. (C) The events of the day, punctuated by the lethal mid-day bomb blast, illuminated many differences between the ruling State Peace and Development Committee and the pro-democracy parties in style, aims, power, and wealth. The democratic parties, absent progress on substantive dialogue leading to political transition, run the risk of becoming irrelevant in the eyes of those who impatiently chafe at the regime's repressive rule. The terrorist bombs of March 27 reinforce the view of some people of the need for continued strong military rule, while for others they highlight ongoing resistance to such rule. The challenge ahead for Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD is to effect visible signs of peaceful progress in the face of determined intransigence on the part of the ruling SPDC and the violent provocations from a small number of anti-regime radicals. End Comment.  
Martinez